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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Six Catholic residents from the rural village of Con Dau, Vietnam, are scheduled to go on trial Wednesday, October 27, for refusing to sell and vacate land—including a longstanding religious burial site—that has been in their village for 135 years to create a tourist resort.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today urged Secretary Clinton to speak about the Con Dau case during an upcoming trip to Hanoi for the Near East Summit. USCIRF also urges the State Department to seek the villagers' unconditional release, as well as to press for the protection of their religious, legal, and property rights under Vietnamese law and international human rights covenants, to which Vietnam is a party.

"We recommend that Secretary Clinton raise with the Vietnamese, both publicly and privately, the case of Con Dau village and make a public statement condemning the continued violence and abuses faced by religious communities in Vietnam," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "The Vietnamese government used intimidation and violence to force Con Dau residents to sell their property. The six detained should be unconditionally released and an investigation should examine allegations that police tortured detainees and caused the death of one Con Dau resident."

USCIRF testified at the August 2010 Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on efforts by the Vietnamese government to obtain the property of Con Dau residents and about general religious freedom abuses in Vietnam. A copy of that testimony can be found at [www.uscifr.gov](http://www.uscifr.gov)

USCIRF staff conducted interviews with Con Dau residents, within the last month, and found credible evidence of intimidation, harassment, restrictions on peaceful religious ceremonies, and torture in detention. As many as 60 people were detained after Con Dau villagers participated in a May 4, 2010, burial ceremony prohibited by the Vietnamese government.

Those taken into custody describe beatings, sleep deprivation, and forced confessions. Eyewitnesses also claim that Mr. Nam Nguyen, the Con Dau resident who died after being in police custody, was healthy and working the day before he died. At his funeral, he had extensive bruises on his body, according to eyewitness accounts. The six who remain in custody have been held for over three months without public charge or legal representation, which is a violation of Vietnamese law.

“What has happened in Con Dau is unconscionable and is too steep a price for economic progress,” said Mr. Leo. “It is well-documented that religious communities in Vietnam—Buddhist, Protestant, Hao Hao, and Catholic—all face restrictions, intimidations, and even violence because of their religious activities or religious freedom activism. Vietnam is supposed to be our new best friend in Asia, but the United States cannot continue to pursue a relationship that advances Vietnam’s economic and security interests without seeing progress on human rights and the rule of law.”

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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